

the Democratic ranking member worked closely to bring this about. We also saw the Senate pass a bipartisan replacement for the broken No Child Left Behind law last summer, 81 to 17. I would like to thank Senator ALEXANDER and Senator MURRAY for working closely across the aisle on that achievement. These represent significant accomplishments for the new Congress and significant wins for the American people. After all, some pundits said Washington could never take these issues on at all. But we did, and we now expect to finish Congress's work on all of those matters in the coming days.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority leader is recognized.

#### WORK OF THE CONGRESS

Mr. REID. Madam President, I appreciate the Republican leader cheering for all of the great things that have happened here in the Senate, but the facts are that—look at any political scientist, anyone who watches what goes on here in Washington and add up the number of bills passed and the nominations confirmed in this Congress—this Congress is well, well beyond anything in recent history.

In addition to that, we have had more revotes—that is, voting on the same thing over and over with the same result—in the history of Congress ever. So I appreciate his trying to make things look good. I hope it gets better in the next couple of weeks because we have a lot to do. We have a lot to do. I will talk about that in a minute. We have so much to do. We can accomplish a great deal if we finish the highway bill and elementary and secondary education, if we do the tax extenders, and if we do the omnibus spending bill. That would be terrific if we could get those done, but we only have a few days to get them done.

#### TRAGEDY AT PLANNED PARENTHOOD CLINIC

Mr. REID. Madam President, our Nation is stunned following last week's wanton murders at the Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs, CO. That heinous attack left three dead: a police officer, a mother of two children, and an Iraq war veteran. Nine others were wounded. It is sickening that these innocent victims were gunned down in cold blood in a medical clinic in the holiday season.

More casualties were avoided by the quick and heroic action taken by responding law enforcement as well as by a courageous bystander named Ke'Arre Stewart, the Iraq war veteran I just mentioned, who heroically reentered the building to provide help. While he was doing that, he was killed—mur-

dered. I can only imagine the heart-breaking anguish that the victims and their families are experiencing. I know it is of little comfort, but the Senate mourns with them. Our thoughts are with them, their families, and the first responders who brought an end to this brutal attack.

But we in the Senate should not fail to see the context in which this vile assault took place. Last summer, a right-wing group began unleashing a series of heavily edited videos with unsubstantiated allegations. Since that time, Republicans in Congress have made it their mission to push these unsubstantiated allegations every chance they get. They are actually baseless.

They also have made it their mission to defund Planned Parenthood, which would irreparably damage this health care provider's future. Republicans have insisted on votes to strip Planned Parenthood from its Federal funding on two different occasions. Neither was successful. But they are still trying.

Republicans want to stop Medicaid reimbursement to Planned Parenthood, among other things. Republicans also believe in politically motivated investigations of Planned Parenthood. The Republican chairman of the House oversight committee, Congressman JASON CHAFFETZ, has admitted that he has uncovered no wrongdoing in his investigation of Planned Parenthood to this point.

But always willing to play a bad hand, that has not stopped House Republicans from allocating \$300,000 of taxpayer money to fund a new politically motivated special subcommittee dedicated to investigating Planned Parenthood. Republicans should not waste their time. I would hope that they give up before they match the millions of dollars—at last count it is more than \$5 million—that they have wasted on the so-called Benghazi "let's get Secretary Clinton" committee, another politically motivated and untimely fruitless attack.

We should never forget that one in five American women will get care from a Planned Parenthood clinic at some point in their life. Cutting off access to important health care services such as breast and cervical screenings and contraception is bad for women and bad for the country.

In the wake of this act of domestic terrorism, I commend Planned Parenthood for refusing to allow threats and violence to stand in the way of its work to ensure women have access to care. I hope everybody understands that I stand with Planned Parenthood. But we as leaders must be mindful of our words and actions. Whipping people into a frenzy of hate and anger while providing them with easy access to firearms has proven disastrous to our country.

We have a responsibility as leaders to think very hard about what we say and do in this context and what the consequences are. We have a responsibility to fund ways to stop this violence.

Democrats are working on reasonable gun safety proposals that will help ensure that firearms are kept out of the hands of people intent on committing violence. It is appalling how many times I have had to make this plea. This terrible event that took place in Colorado just a few days ago is already off the news. Why? Because it happens so often in America. It is appalling how many times I have had to make this plea, but I say to my Republican colleagues yet again: Join with us in passing sensible gun safety reforms. Help us keep guns away from people intent on using them to slaughter innocent people.

First, we must do something to close to loopholes that allow FBI terror suspects and other unhinged individuals to legally buy AK-47s and other weapons. Right now a terror suspect, someone who is listed on the watch list, can walk into a gun store or a gun show and purchase sophisticated assault weapons. To leave that loophole unaddressed is sheer recklessness by congressional Republicans. Someone on the terrorist watch list can walk in and buy a gun, any gun they want. That is not good.

We must also strengthen our Nation's background check system. We are failing to flag and prevent people who are mentally ill or who have violent motives from legally purchasing weapons. Improved background checks are essential in keeping guns out of the wrong hands. What we are saying is if someone is a felon, a criminal or crazy, they shouldn't be able to purchase a gun without a background check, and they should never be able to purchase a gun—period.

Finally, we have to close loopholes that allow people to illegally traffic in firearms. What does this mean? Right now we have no laws in place to adequately prevent individuals from purchasing weapons—buy huge numbers of weapons. Then what do they do with them? Sell them at a great profit and transfer them to criminals.

For example, a person with a clean background can purchase an unlimited number of guns and then turn around and sell them to a cartel, a gang or a terrorist organization with no threat of prosecution. Unfortunately, as in the past, Republicans are nowhere to be found when it comes to implementing these commonsense changes to our gun laws. For example, as to the Colorado Springs murders, did we hear a single Republican running for President of the United States stand and say: We have too many guns; can't we stop this?

I haven't heard a single Republican Senator come to the floor and say something about this terrible event that took place. Instead, they are busy fear-mongering against Syrian refugees, those fleeing Assad and ISIS. We have a rigorous screening process for when we accept refugees. The refugees we are accepting are women, children, and older men with families. Less than

2 percent of the men who come as refugees from Syria or Iraq are of military age. The Department of Homeland Security has verified that not one of the 1,800 Syrian refugees already admitted to the United States has a single confirmed tie to terrorism, but in spite of all the facts, Republicans would focus their attention on refugees and ignore the problem we have with gun violence in America.

Republicans would have Americans believe Syrian refugees are the pre-eminent threat to our national security, and meanwhile the Republican Congress is doing nothing to curb our Nation's gun violence. It is a sad commentary on Republicans that they are more concerned about keeping Syrian refugees out of America than they are about keeping guns out of the hands of terrorists, those who are mentally ill, and those who are criminals.

#### PARIS CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE

Mr. REID. Madam President, as we speak, in faraway Paris, France, 194 countries are gathering to negotiate an international agreement to address climate change. Fortunately for the world, President Obama is committed to doing something about that climate change.

I send all my appreciation, my accolades to the French people for going ahead with this extremely important conference and not letting those terrible acts that occurred stop them from doing so. Because of President Obama's leadership, the United States is taking on a more prominent role in rolling back dangerous carbon emissions, not only from our country but from China, India, Brazil, and other major sources of climate-changing pollution.

Before the conference in Paris even started, more than 170 countries representing over 90 percent of global carbon emissions made concrete pledges to reduce carbon pollution. Climate change is among the most serious problems we face today. What does the Pentagon say? What do all the security agencies say is the most serious problem facing America today? Climate change. We are beginning to endure the devastating consequences of rising sea levels, extreme weather, and drought across America and all over the world.

No country acting alone can halt climate change, but through American leadership and international cooperation, we can protect our air and climate for our children and their children. I commend President Obama for his work domestically and internationally to address this issue.

#### FINISHING THE SENATE'S WORK

Mr. REID. Madam President, this year is quickly drawing to a close, as I mentioned earlier. That means the Senate has precious few days left to finish vitally important legislative matters, and it is not a small list. Be-

fore we leave this year, we need to address funding to prevent a government shutdown, a surface transportation bill, the elementary and secondary education conference report, important expiring tax provisions, including those for the middle class, not just for the big corporations, and a growing backlog of nominations, particularly those involving national security positions.

Each of these matters I just mentioned is essential. We have to get them done, and we don't have a lot of time to do it. There is certainly no time for demagoguery and political distractions such as repealing Obama Care or defunding Planned Parenthood that have been the hallmarks of the Republican Congress. Instead, I hope my Republican colleagues will work with Democrats to accomplish all of the Senate's work in a timely fashion.

Madam President, Senator MCCONNELL and I have finished our remarks. What now is the business of the day?

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 5 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to finish my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### PUERTO RICO

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I rise to speak on Puerto Rico's financial and economic challenges.

The Government of Puerto Rico tells us the territory has more than \$73 billion in debt that is, to use their words, "not payable." On top of that, Puerto Rico has tens of billions of dollars in unfunded pension liabilities and very few assets to back up its pension promises. The economy in Puerto Rico has persistently registered double-digit unemployment rates, staggeringly low labor force participation rates and a bloated public sector and there are growing strains on Puerto Rico's health care system, some of which reflected the way the so-called Affordable Care Act was written to treat Puerto Rico and other territories, some of which reflects differing treatment between Puerto Rico, where residents do not pay Federal personal income taxes, and States where residents are included in the Federal personal income tax system. In short, there is very little good economic news coming from Puerto Rico these days. As a result, we are seeing an ongoing debate

about what the Federal Government can or should do in order to help the American citizens residing in Puerto Rico.

To me, this debate boils down to four relatively simple questions: Question No. 1, should the Federal Government allow Puerto Rico access to chapter 9 of the Bankruptcy Code or to even broader debt resolution tools; question No. 2, will providing fresh tax incentives to Puerto Rico help boost the island's economy by creating jobs and stimulating growth; question No. 3, should Congress increase Federal resources to help ease Puerto Rico's strained health care system; and question No. 4, should we take steps to exempt Puerto Rico from burdensome Federal regulations—including labor, transportation, and energy regulations—that may be contributing to the territory's ongoing economic struggles?

Today we have seen a number of proposals that attempt to address these and other questions, although, in my opinion, many of them do so in very awkward ways. I want to take time today to address each of these four major questions in turn and hopefully shed some light on what we have to consider as we try to address the growing crisis in Puerto Rico.

So far, the majority of these discussions among policymakers with regard to Puerto Rico have focused on question No. 1, allowing access to chapter 9 bankruptcy relief. As we all know, chapter 9 applies specifically to financially distressed municipalities that are seeking protection from creditors as they develop and negotiate plans to adjust their debts. Puerto Rico is not currently eligible for chapter 9 bankruptcy, meaning that granting them access to this type of relief will require a legislative change to the Bankruptcy Code, which may come with its own set of problems. Some proponents of the bankruptcy solutions for Puerto Rico have argued that the clear language preventing the island from accessing chapter 9 reflects some sort of drafting error. They argue further that once Puerto Rico is eligible for chapter 9 protections, it should apply to debts already incurred.

Now, whether the exclusion for Puerto Rico from chapter 9 was intentional—and I don't believe it was—we should keep in mind that there are potential rule-of-law issues at stake when we talk about legislative action to retroactively alter the terms of debt contracts. Puerto Rico's creditors entered into their contracts with the various existing risks priced into the agreements in the form of interest rates and other terms. If the island had been eligible for chapter 9 bankruptcy prior to entering into those agreements, creditors would have formed different expectations, likely leading to different terms, including differing interest rates that could have reshaped the demand for Puerto Rico bonds. This is not rocket science. This is finance 101.